



**August Interim Report
By
Senator Gary Stevens**

A busy July has given way to an active August as the legislative interim continues. July's major news was Governor Walker's decision to accept federal funding to expand Medicaid coverage in Alaska. The state estimates about 40 thousand uninsured Alaskans will receive coverage, and 4 thousand new jobs will be created. As you probably know, the governor used his power of executive order to accept federal funding for Medicaid expansion as a bill calling for expansion did not advance in the legislature this year.

I believe the governor has made the right decision for Alaska on this issue, and I can tell you the number of constituents who have contacted me in favor of Medicaid expansion far outweighed those opposed. Also, in a poll we conducted earlier this year through the District P email list 77% of the respondents were in favor of expanding the program.

Heroin Use Rising

One of July's sobering notes was the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services July 14th report detailing the rise of heroin use and heroin-related deaths in the state and our coastal communities. I had an opportunity to discuss the issue with the Director of the Alaska State Troopers, Colonel James Cockrell, and members of his staff, who are working with federal and local authorities to combat this critical problem.

A way you can help is to report suspicious activity to your community's police departments. The Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak also have the Crime Stoppers program, which allow you to phone in anonymous tips. In Kodiak, Crime Stoppers can be reached at 486-3113. You can contact Crime Stoppers on the Kenai Peninsula at 1-800-478-4258.

Winter Ferry Schedule Due Out Soon

Thanks to residents from around the district who offered their comments on the Fall, Winter and Spring 2015-2016 Alaska Marine Highway System Schedule during a July 22nd teleconference. The final schedule is due in mid-August.

District R Newsmakers

Congratulations to Hospice of Homer on 30 years of service to the southern Kenai Peninsula. The group, which has helped over a thousand people over the years, and provides services at no cost to clients thanks to donations from community members.

Congratulations to the Kodiak Word Bridge Team, winners of the first place award in the 2015 NASA World Wind Europa Challenge held last month in Italy. Comprised of Kodiak High School students Levi Purdy, Anna McDonald, John Dunlop, and Kyle Ruotsalainen, the team partnered with NASA Ames Research Center to develop the GEFS project, a web-based World Wind mapping application to aid in the furthering of pre-earthquake signal detection research. The Kodiak students competed with nine international universities and businesses. Their project was the first submission ever from a high school to compete in the Europa Challenge. Thanks to team sponsors Ron Fortunato of Trillium Learning's World Bridge Project and Neil Moomey, as well as the Kodiak Island Borough School District's administration for their support in this endeavor.

Congratulations to Brittany Tregarthen of Kodiak on her outstanding performance at the recent Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles. A powerlifter and one of a four Alaskans on the United States team, Brittany won a silver medal for bench-pressing 110 pounds, a bronze medal for squatting 143.5 pounds, and another bronze medal in the overall competition.

Transportation Department STIP

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is accepting public comment through Thursday, August 27th on the 2016-2019 Strategic Improvement Plan (STIP). The STIP is the state's four-year program for transportation system preservation and development. It includes interstate, state and some local highways, bridges, ferries and public transportation, but does not include airports or non-ferry-related ports and harbors. It covers all system improvements for which partial or full federal funding is approved and that are expected to take place during the four-year duration of the STIP.

The STIP can be viewed via the Internet at: www.dot.state.ak.us/stip

Schools Opening This Month

Schools in Kachemak-Selo, Razoldna and Voznesenka opened to students on Friday, August 7th, and schools throughout the district opening later this month. On behalf of all of us in the Senate District P office, I wish our young residents the best in the classroom this academic year.

Beware of Scams

Periodically, constituents contact us about scammers attempting to gain access to their personal information such as bank account and social security numbers. In an effort to raise awareness of this dangerous issue, Tonya Muldoon of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Senior and Disabilities Services has provided us with the article below:

Scams: common, sophisticated and serious

Seniors — and all of us — beware!

Alaskans tend to be friendly and community-oriented, and enjoy talking with people from outside our communities. We also receive dividends, and many of us live alone. Unfortunately, this can make us vulnerable to fraudsters – by phone, mail, online or in person.

The senior population in Alaska is a particular target for scams, because many seniors have high property values and have built stable retirement investments.

Once fraudsters have our money, it's usually gone for good. Most scammers are outside of the United States and nothing can be done to get the funds back. We may now be in danger of identity theft, too, on top of not being able to pay bills or obtain future credit.

Scammers are sophisticated and persistent, so while the Federal Trade Commission and its state and federal partners keep cracking down on scam after scam, the best way to avoid trouble is to recognize scams in the first place.

You've won! (Not really...)

One of the most common scams is that you've won a prize, but have to pay a fee to collect it, said Laurie Milligan in the Alaska Office of Elder Fraud & Assistance.

“Do not pay any money for anything you've won,” Milligan said.

In one example earlier this year, consumers around the country got official-looking letters, supposedly from the Federal Trade Commission, saying the recipient had won a cash prize and the FTC would help them claim it and get it delivered safely — for a fee. People reported the scam, and the FTC posted online that the letters were fake.

Signs of a scam

Scams come in such a variety of forms that it's hard to keep up with them all. The biggest red flag is something that seems too good to be true, or close.

Scammers will often ask for a bank account or credit card number. You may be asked to wire money. They may even send you a check, but the check will be counterfeit. If you deposit it and get money from your bank, you will owe the money back to the bank.

Scammers have become very sophisticated, and can be very convincing. They use names of real companies, like Publisher's Clearing House, and official government agencies. Many people have sent thousands of dollars thinking that the payout is coming.

If you're offered a prize or a great deal — maybe so great it makes you suspicious — stop and check it out.

Protect yourself

1) Get educated about scams. Look on the FTC website for information about current scams: www.consumer.ftc.gov/scam-alerts. You can also follow the FTC on Facebook or Twitter.

The Better Business Bureau has some local fraud alerts. Watch the news, too, and chat about current scams with your friends, neighbors, grocery clerk and others in your community.

2) If you're contacted about winning a prize when you don't remember entering a contest, or any scenario where you're asked to send money, do not send money. Ask for a call-back number and do some research. If you're pressured to participate NOW, that's a good clue that it's not legitimate. If you don't feel comfortable with conflict and have a hard time saying no, it's perfectly OK to tell a little white lie about something on the stove boiling over to get off the phone quickly.

3) Report suspected fraud. A great place to start is www.stopfraud.gov/report.html. You can also contact the Alaska Consumer Protection Unit at 888-576-2529. If you've gotten something suspicious in the mail, you can report it to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/contactus/filecomplaint.aspx> or 800-ASK-USPS (800-275-8777).

Scammers once relied on being protected by people feeling too embarrassed to speak up once they realized they'd been had, but that's changing. Fraud outfits are very savvy, invest in cutting edge technology, and can copy official materials exactly. Competent, knowledgeable people understand that it is no shame to be misled nowadays. Given the scope and sophistication of the global fraud scheme network, it is just one of the hazards of modern life.

4) If you sent money but on second thought believe that you may have been scammed, call the local police and your bank immediately. Seniors (or their family members) can also call Adult Protective Services, 800-478-9996, or Elder Fraud & Assistance, 334-5989, during regular business hours. If your bank is not helpful, the Elder Fraud & Assistance office wants to hear about it.

Think you might have been scammed? Call fast.

Don't hesitate to call if you think you may have been scammed. If you act fast, state officials, banks and law enforcement can help you protect the assets you have left.

They can put a freeze on your bank account to keep it from being drained, if you ask, and take steps to recover your money.

On July 30 this year, the Federal Trade Commission sent nearly \$1 million dollars to consumers who had lost money in a credit card interest rate reduction scam.

If you have been scammed, you may need to change your phone number and account information. In some cases, the scammers can become aggressive when the money stops. You may receive threatening phone calls. All threats need to be taken seriously and reported to the police.

By educating and protecting each other, we can thwart this exploitation.

Here to Help

My Homer, Kodiak and Juneau Capitol Building offices will be open throughout the remainder of the Interim to help you with matters involving state government agencies.

We can be reached in Homer at 235-0690, in n Kodiak at 486-4925, or toll-free at 1-800-821-4925.

E-mail me anytime at: sen.gary.stevens@akleg.gov.

Thank you for reading this edition of the *Interim Report*.